



YOUR LETTERS

MAILBOX

Judging from this month's mail, readers are experiencing a few trust issues, ranging from price discrepancies to environmental concerns. Still, at least you trust us with your email address

★ Fast becoming impossible Broadband suppliers in breach of contract



Regarding broadband speeds, Colin Partington asked, "Is this not contrary to the Sale of Goods Act or Trade Descriptions?" (*Letters, Shopper 242*). I can confirm that this is indeed the case. I have been with several broadband suppliers in the past 12 months in my quest for the fabled 8Mbit/s they're all touting. In each case, I was tied to a term contract.

Furthermore, in each case, under the Sale of Goods Act, this contract did not hold water. They all eventually admitted that they "cannot supply"

what we are paying for. Therefore, they are in breach of said contract. I have successfully left all my previous suppliers simply by quoting this to them.

Like Colin, I am currently with Virgin Media and am having trouble with the quoted speeds not being attainable. But where else is there for me to go? I have tried quite a few suppliers. To be honest, I am despairing of ever finding one that 'does what it says on the tin'.

David Archer-Longden



◀ Fill in our broadband speed survey and you could win a Mesh Pegasus M670 laptop

Thanks for the tip. It's one thing to receive poor service, but another to feel powerlessly tied to a contract. Most of the *Shopper* staff are languishing below the 8Mbit/s level, although Labs Manager Chris Finnermore zooms around the internet at 24Mbit/s. That's because he is in ISP Be's catchment area and happens to live within 500 yards of the exchange. He gets 18-19Mbit/s and yes, it's OK to hate him.

Shopper is trying to find the UK's best ISP, but we need your help. Just go to www.realbroadbandspeed.co.uk and fill in our five-minute survey, telling us all about your current ISP. You'll be able to speed-test your connection, and you'll also be in with a chance of winning a £600 Mesh laptop.



BROADBAND BOOST

On the subject of broadband speed, there seems to be a simple way to increase it by a considerable margin. I tested the speed of my connection some time back, and was disappointed to find it was only around 1,600Kbit/s. I'm paying for a service that offers up to 8Mbit/s. After talking to my ISP about this, one thing that emerged is that extension phones can cause a problem. It was suggested that I disconnect the extensions.

This was not very practical. However, as I played about with various options, I found that by making sure the router/modem is plugged into the first socket and then adding one of the broadband filters to the line that then feeds all the other extensions, my broadband speed improves. It has increased from 1,600Kbit/s to around 4,100Kbit/s. My son-in-law has also tried this technique, with similar gains. This might not work in all cases, but it's worth a try.

Steve Clarkson

ADSL's biggest enemy is interference. This is why those furthest from the telephone exchange get lower speeds than customers who live closer. The power of the signal drops over distance and becomes more vulnerable to rogue signals. Similarly, dodgy telephone wiring in the house can create problems, ranging from slightly slow speeds to a failing connection. As it was with dial-up, so it remains with ADSL.

As you've discovered, moving your router/modem to the first available socket in your internal telephone network provides the best signal. By adding a filter to separate the rest of the line, you prevent interference from bad wiring, telephones, answering machines and any other device you have attached.

See our broadband feature on page 126 for more information on how to diagnose and fix common internet problems.



DESPERATELY SEEKING EVESHAM

I know Evesham was rescued from insolvency a few months ago, but now it seems it has closed its phone lines and its website is off-line. Has Evesham closed down with my PC in for repair? Is this news to you?

Tim

When we received your email, Evesham – or rather the company using the Evesham brand (see *News*, page 10 for details) – appeared to be operating and its phone lines and website were all working. However, as we went to press, things had taken a nasty turn and Evesham's future now looks decidedly sticky.

The old Evesham company was called Evesham Technology Ltd, and this is now in receivership. A new company called Geomore Technology Ltd currently operates using the Evesham brand name. The latest news is that the old Evesham warranties are

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now invalid and that Geemore itself is actually up for sale.

Ignoring for a moment the various conspiracy theories surrounding the personalities behind this situation, the most important issue is for customers who are no longer covered by warranties, and those who have not yet received their PCs or, like you, have sent in a PC for repair.

When a company goes under, the receiver tries to raise as much money as possible to pay the company's debts. As an unsecured creditor, you are at the end of the line of people and organisations waiting for repayment. According to Trading Standards, you will be paid "if there is any money left after all the expenses of winding up the company have been met and certain creditors such as government departments, called preferential creditors, have been paid".

We know that many readers will be affected by Evesham's situation and we'll do our best to keep you informed here in *Letters*, in *News* and on our website (www.computershopper.co.uk). The website is the best place to check for the very latest developments.



EVESHAM LAPTOP NOT SO GOOD TO GO

A nightmare scenario has arisen for customers of Evesham. The company is unable to provide replacement batteries for laptop users. I was told that the issues affecting Evesham recently would not impact its ability to deliver great service. Its website still states that it provides an award-winning service.

I have a laptop I bought about 18 months ago and it requires a new battery. Imagine my surprise when I emailed Evesham to find out how much a new battery would cost, only to be told that it has none, doesn't know where to source them from and has no date for resolving this issue. I now have a laptop that's great for mobile use as long as I have a really long cable to plug it into the power supply at home. This is over a grand's worth of laptop that can't be used on the go!

Mike Ashworth

Although your situation is not as desperate as Tim's (see previous letter), we sympathise entirely. A battery-less laptop can be useless to some. However, all is not lost. Companies such as Evesham rarely make their own laptop chassis or batteries. In fact, very few companies make laptop batteries. As a result, it is usually possible to find replacements. How successful you will be in your search depends on the exact model of laptop you have.

A quick search in Google for 'evesham laptop replacement battery' brought up a few likely-looking options, including www.battech.co.uk, which indicates that some Evesham laptops use the same battery type as certain Advent and Mitac laptops. The www.laptopshop.co.uk site goes one better and lists Evesham models, including the Voyager 5500. A similar selection is available at www.computerbatteries.co.uk.

Our advice, if your model does not match any of those listed by the battery suppliers, is to search for the model name that you own plus the keywords 'oem' or 'manufacturer'. For example, searching for 'evesham voyager oem' using Google provides a number of links that indicate which manufacturer made the specific

Voyager chassis. Finding a battery to match this chassis may be easier than finding one labelled as an 'Evesham' model.



FEEDING THE MASSES

In *Shopper* 241, you devoted a page to the massive energy consumption of computers (*News*, page 17). However, you ignore this subject in your *Labs* tests. You do not tell us what the tested desktop PCs consume, or that PVRs typically (always?) have their hard disks running all the time they are switched on, even if not recording, or what routers consume when they are plugged in all day. If you're serious about the subject, you need to tell us.

Alan Kennedy

We are very serious about the subject, not least because so many *Shopper* readers have expressed an interest. We have plans to report on power consumption for a variety of devices under different sets of circumstances. We're introducing these figures for all devices soon, and now have the test kit we need. In a forthcoming feature, we'll examine how much power electrical devices use in standby, when 'off' and running at full load. We'll look at how much energy is used powering routers, PVRs, TVs and other devices you're likely to have running at home. We'll even have tips on how to cut your consumption without making life too inconvenient.



ARE YOU FEELING THE SHOPPER 'LOVE'?

Further to Chas Large's worry about printing email addresses in *Helpfile*, my address was published with a letter from me in *Letters*, *Shopper* 241. Four weeks later, and I am happy to report that not a single spam has arrived at that address. However, I stupidly published a more frequently used address in my local Freecycle forum and have been inundated with 'love' and such spams. It is probably best to use an address that you are prepared to abandon if you are publishing it in some open forum.

Tony Sparkes

Your analysis is spot on. The minute you publish your email address in a public internet forum, where it is stored and displayed electronically, it is an easy target for spammers. They use automatic tools to scan the internet looking for addresses, and add them to their lists of potential victims.

This reminds us of a trick people used to use to detect when companies sold their details on. Back when all junk mail came through the letter box, canny punters would use subtly different name or address details whenever they signed up with a mail order company. For example, instead of calling yourself Fred Smith, you might use Freddie Smith or F R Smithe when buying from a certain company or signing up to one of those book clubs. When junk mail turns up addressed to one of these slightly anomalous names, you know you've been sold out.

The same principle applies to using online shops. Many email addresses can be changed slightly but still work. So if your ISP gives you an address such as <anything>@yourchoice.isp.net, you can use words like 'amazon' or 'hsbc' instead of <anything>. Google Mail has an interesting 'bug' whereby dots are not recognised in email addresses. So fredsmith@googlemail.com can also use fred.smith@; f.red.smith@ and so on. Using extra dots in your username when registering with different services won't stop spam, but it will give you an insight into where your address is being leaked.



HAVE I SPAMMED MYSELF?

I have spam filters set up on my PC so spam is removed before reaching my inbox. I check what is in the bulk folder of the Yahoo! mail service, as some legitimate mail also ends up there. After returning from holiday, I checked the spam emails and was surprised to find that I have spam sent from what appears to be my own email address.

Do I have a serious underlying problem and, if so, what checks do I need to make? I use Norton Internet Security, Ad-Aware and XoftSpy to try to keep my PC safe. Should I be checking for something else?

Jim ☺

WRITE IN AND WIN!

If you want to make the most out of your home movies and photographs, then Adobe's Photoshop Elements 6 and Premiere Elements 4 are the best and easiest programs for the job. If you fancy getting your hands on these products, there's no need to put your hand in your pocket; all you have to do is write a great letter. Get it printed as our Star Letter, and a copy of both applications will be winging their way to you in the post.

Photoshop Elements 6 is the best home photo-editing application. Its powerful features are taken from the full Photoshop application, so you can get the same results, but Elements is a lot easier to use. Premiere Elements 4 does a similar job for movie making, pulling its features from the high-end Premiere software, but making it all easier to use, so you'll be able to produce Hollywood-style movies from the comfort of your home.



PLUS!

Every published letter-writer who provides their address also receives a *Computer Shopper* mug





First off, you are not at fault. Spammers not only collect email addresses to use as recipients of adverts and viruses, but they also use them to forge the sender's address. Reply to a spam and you are exceptionally unlikely to send a message to anyone even vaguely responsible for sending the original message. You are not guilty of anything, other than having an email address.

We could not help noticing your choice of XoftSpy as an anti-spyware program. We've not used or tested this before, although we have read reports that it's not as effective as some. The Spyware Warrior website (www.spywarewarrior.com) notes that, until a few years ago, XoftSpy was considered a rogue anti-spyware program "because of concerns with false positives, questionable licence terms and the use of aggressive, deceptive advertising (1, 2), including exploitation of the name 'spybot' by affiliates". Apparently, this situation has changed.

Our current anti-spyware recommendations include AVG Anti-Spyware, the free version of which does not provide real-time protection (neither does the free version of Ad-Aware or XoftSpy). As you already have Norton Internet Security, which does monitor your system constantly, you should avoid other real-time products or risk reduced system performance.



A WEEE CONCERN

Your article about electrical waste in a recent issue ('WEEE: The Facts', *Shopper* 236) nicely described the logistics of current waste disposal issues, but failed to show the reasons why this is necessary. The January 2008 issue of *National Geographic* magazine (<http://tinyurl.com/2be7n4>) does so

in graphic detail. I am not a 'green campaigner', but the descriptions and pictures cannot fail to raise concerns.

To summarise the article, some obsolete computer equipment is sent to landfill. Here, toxic metals and plastic waste products leak out and contaminate the environment, which is why landfill sites in Western Europe no longer accept it. So most equipment goes to Africa or Asia for 'recycling'. This often involves burning the parts to recover the metal, which has two side-effects. The first is the release of heavy metal products, such as lead, which are highly toxic. The second is the conversion of plastic into poisons, such as Dioxin, which happens as insulation is burnt off copper wire. The cost to human life and the environment is immeasurable.

This, then, is the true cost of upgrading to Windows Vista.

Andy Micklethwaite

It is a sobering thought that upgrading to the latest hardware just in order to run a new and hungry operating system, office suite or game can have dreadful consequences to the environment. And of course, the piles of poisonous crap that are the result of upgrading mobile phones, ADSL routers and hard disks exist out of our sight so they are easy to ignore.

Luckily, lots of people, including many *Shopper* readers, are not ignoring this situation. This brings



▲ Creative's Aurvana Live! headphones, as reviewed in *Shopper* 241

pressure to bear on governments and, directly or indirectly, technology companies. Large firms such as Dell and HP run recycling schemes for old PCs, ink cartridges and so on. Research and development departments now see a value in reducing or replacing the heavy metals used in components, which all goes towards mitigating what could be an environmental (or PR) disaster some way down the line.

Despite being interested in technology, *Shopper* readers are generally canny and they rarely upgrade just for the sake of it, whether or not the environment is at risk. We know this because a lot of you write in claiming to use Windows 98 and refusing to upgrade because you can still do what you want with your current Pentium 166MHz PC, 14in CRT monitor and dot matrix printer!



GETTING CREATIVE WITH PRICES

I saw your review of the Creative Aurvana Live! headphones in *Shopper* 241, and when I visited the Creative website to buy them the price was £89.99. Where did you get £65 from? I was very disappointed. Another thing: there was no offer of an extension lead.

Alistair Read

Computer Shopper not only reviews products but we provide another service that we don't really highlight, which is to find the best prices. More often than

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not these are available from companies other than the manufacturer. We got the price of £65 from www.komplett.co.uk and, to be fair to us, the review does list the price and the supplier in clear view. If you decide to buy direct from Creative then that's your choice, but the price we quote is from the supplier we list.

We don't know why you don't believe us about the extension lead, either. If you want confirmation just check Creative's site, which clearly lists a 1.5m extension cable in the package contents.



PIGGY IN THE MIDDLE

I would like to make a few comments arising from a story that I read in *News, Shopper* 241.

Regarding 'piggybacking' on other people's wireless networks, I'm not surprised that this is so common. I recently set up a BT Home Hub. Nowhere in the User Guide or the setup CD was there any reference to securing the network, or instructions as to how to do it. In fact, to access the settings you have to click on an Advanced link.

On doing so, you are presented with a message saying, "On most Broadband access and home networks, there should be no need to access this menu unless instructed to do so by the helpdesk or a network administrator". If you continue, you can log in and configure the security settings.

The average user is surely going to think that the setup process is finished once the network is up and running, as the user guide implies, and will never bother to access the router's configuration. If they try, they are

likely to be put off by the warning message. I find this a little irresponsible from a major ISP.

Alan Roadley

We reckon that users should secure themselves as much as they reasonably can, but that manufacturers should make a good effort to keep life safe and easy for everyone. In BT's case, things are not quite as bad as you suggest. Traditionally, you'd have had to log into your router and enable security settings, most of which were disabled by default. Those that were enabled, such as wireless networks, usually had a default setting that was widely known and, therefore, not very secure.

In the case of the BT Home Hub, the default wireless security is handled by WEP. Each unit comes with a unique WEP code, printed on the hub itself. You need to type this code into each wireless-equipped PC that you want to connect. Although WEP is not as secure as the WPA alternative (also supported by the Home Hub), it is better than nothing, and should be sufficient to prevent casual wireless piggybacking.



WORD TO THE WISE

With reference to inserting a 'therefore' symbol in *Word (Letters, Shopper* 241), the easiest way is to change the font to Symbol and press the backslash key (\).

Mak

Your solution certainly works, and it's the simplest and most elegant we've seen, but as die-hard techies we prefer the blood, sweat and tears of memorising ASCII codes and obscure keyboard short cuts. **ES**

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